

## The Generic Integrity of Newspaper Editorials: A Systemic Functional Perspective

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### Abstract

One fruitful line of research has been to explore the local linguistic as well as global rhetorical patterns of particular genres in order to identify their recognizable structural identity, or what Bhatia (1999, p. 22) calls “generic integrity.” In terms of methodology, to date most genre-based studies have employed one or the other of Swales’s move-analytic models of text analysis to investigate whether or not the generic prototypical patterns that he has introduced exist universally. This paper, however, considers the application of the Systemic Functional (SF) theory of language to genre analysis. The paper looks, in particular, at distinctive rhetorical features of English newspaper editorials as an important public “Cinderella” genre and proposes a generic prototypical pattern of text development for editorials or what Halliday and Hasan (1989) refer to as the *Generic Structure Potential* (GSP) of a genre. The results of this study should benefit both genre theory and Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) and will be, it seems, of interest not only to applied linguists, but to those involved in education, journalism, and the media.

**Keywords:** genre analysis, Generic Structure Potential (GSP), Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), newspaper editorials.

### Introduction

During the last 20 years, there has been an increasing interest in the study of genre both within and across various language use domains (see, e.g., Dudley-Evans, 1986; Hopkins & Dudley-Evans, 1988; Swales, 1990; Bhatia, 1993, 1999; Holmes, 1997; Williams, 1999; Henry & Roseberry, 2001, Samraj, 2002; Shaw, 2003; Halleck, &

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Connor, 2004; to name but a few). Genre, which has traditionally been a literary concept, has recently become a popular framework for analyzing the form and rhetorical function of non-literary discourse such as research articles, theses/dissertations, textbooks, news reports, editorials,... serving as a tool for developing educational practices in rhetoric, linguistics, composition studies, English for Specific Purposes (ESP), English for Academic Purposes (EAP), etc. This interest has, to a large extent, been motivated by the need to provide a descriptively comprehensive model of texts to be later used as a pedagogic tool to develop in non-native speakers of English an ability to use it for more effective communication. Perhaps now it is a propitious time to declare, as Candlin (1993, p. ix) puts it, that “genre is a concept that has found its time.”

Genre analysis is essentially based on two central assumptions. Firstly, the features of a similar group of texts depend on the social context of their creation and use. Secondly, those features can be described in a way that relates a text to other texts like it (see Hyland, 2002, p. 114). In the literature on genre analysis, a useful model for defining genres is provided by Swales (1990). He provides a definition of genre that focuses on the communicative purpose of discourse:

A genre comprises a class of communicative events, the members of which share some set of communicative purposes. These purposes are recognized by the expert members of the parent discourse community, and thereby constitute the rationale for the genre. This rationale shapes the schematic structure of the discourse and influences and constrains choice of content and style. Communicative purpose is both a privileged criterion and one that operates to keep the scope of a genre as here conceived narrowly focused on comparable rhetorical action. In addition to purpose, exemplars of genre exhibit various patterns of similarity in terms of structure, style, content, and intended audience. If all high probability expectations are realized, the exemplar will be viewed as prototypical by the parent discourse community. The genre names inherited and produced by discourse communities and imported by others constitute valuable ethnographic communication, but typically need further validation. (p. 58)

In this light, Swales (1981) investigates 45 *Research Article* (RA) introductions and reports that the majority of them follow a 4-move rhetorical pattern: (1) establishing the field, (2) summarizing previous research, (3) preparing for present research, and (4) introducing present research. Later, however, Swales (1990) revises his early 1981 4-move model and proposes a more elaborate approach what he calls a 3-move “Create-A-

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Research-Space (CARS) model: (1) establishing the territory, (2) locating a research niche, and (3) occupying the niche.

Following this move-analytic tradition pioneered mostly by Hopkins and Dudley-Evans (1988), Bhatia (1993), and most famously, Swales's (1990) description of the RA introduction, most research has focused, to name the most popular targets of linguistic investigation, on *academic genres* such as *grant proposals* (Connor & Mauranen, 1999; Connor, 2000), *discussion sections of research articles* (Holmes, 1997; Biria & Tahririan, 1997; Fallahi & Erzi, 2003), *abstracts* (Hyland, 2000), *dissertation acknowledgements* (Hyland, 2003, in press), *editorial letters* (Flowerdew & Dudley-Evans, 2002), *academic book reviews* (Motta-Roth, 1995, Babaii, 2003, Babaii & Ansary, forthcoming), *academic e-mails* (Amirian & Tahririan, 2003), *graduate student seminars* (Weissberg, 1993), etc.

Some other studies, following the same tradition, have explored *business genres* such as *sales letters* (Bhatia, 1993), *direct mail letters* (Upton, 2001), *job application letters* (Henry & Roseberry, 2001), *business faxes* (Akar & Louhiala-Salminen, 1999), etc. Besides, addressing Stubbs's (1996) criticism that analysts have largely concentrated on conveniently short texts, some scholars have explored longer texts such as *science books* (Fuller, 1998), *Ph.D. dissertations* (Bunton, 1999), *school textbooks* (Eggins et al., 1993; Love, 1993; Coffin, 1997; Veel, 1998, Ansary & Babaii, 2000)....

In terms of methodology, however, almost all genre-based studies have employed one or the other of Swales's move-analytic models of text analysis to investigate whether or not the generic prototypical rhetorical patterns that he has introduced exist universally. The present study, by contrast, utilizes the Systemic Functional (SF) theory of language as a text-analytic tool to examine the distinctive rhetorical structure of English newspaper editorials as a professional non-academic/public 'Cinderella' genre with the aim of formulating the *Generic Structure Potential* (GSP) of editorial texts that may capture the actual rhetorical patterns of text development in editorials. This paper argues that a GSP of this kind can best account for the concept of 'editorial texts' as a 'genre'.

### **SFL as a viable analytical tool for the analysis of text**

This study brings in the Hallidayian Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL) model of text analysis as a point of reference or, truly, as a workable theoretical framework for the analysis of editorials. This initiative is taken on several theoretical grounds. Firstly, SFL “interprets language as being a system network of meaning *potential*” (Morley, 1985, p. 42) and describes language as being “made up of systems, each having a set of features which are in contrast with one another” (ibid). SFL thus accounts not only for *paradigmatic* relations of systems, but also for *syntagmatic* relations of structure and sequence. Secondly, for Halliday (1990, p. 34), SFL is particularly suitable for the type of investigation that

... enables us to analyse any passage and relate it to its context in the discourse, and also to the general background of the text: who it is written for, what is its angle on the subject matter and so on.

In addition, seen from a genre-analytic perspective, SFL not only provides a detailed description of the rhetorical functions and linguistic structures of English (cf. Halliday, 1985 a & b, 1994), but goes further and relates the contextual dimensions of register/genre to the semantic and grammatical organization of language itself. Similarly, it has the potential to develop detailed specifications of the staging structures and realizational features of different genres, as well as accounts of how genres can relate to and evolve into other genres, thus providing replicable accounts of *different* genres in a *single* culture and of *similar* genres *across* cultures. Finally, although not so much related to the purposes of this study, a further dimension of this approach is that it takes contextual explanation one step further, by recognizing that the differences between texts are also the reflection of a more abstract contextual dimension that may be called *ideology*.

### **Genre vs. register in SFL**

Often a question arises as to whether the concepts of ‘register’ and ‘genre’ are distinct. A word or two on this distinction seems, therefore, necessary here. Both register and genre theories seek to explain variation in texts by reference to variation in context. That is, explicit links are often made between features of the discourse and variables of the social and cultural context in which the discourse is enacted. The concept of ‘register’ is, in fact, a theoretical explanation of the observation that we use language differently in

different situations. It is a Context of Situation (CS) index or, in other words, it accounts for usage variation with reference to a specific CS (cf. Eggins & Martin, 1997, pp. 237-243). Theorizing the language-context relationship, i.e., what dimension of context matters to text, and how context gets 'into' text, is a central concern in register theory (see, e.g., Halliday, 1985a). These niceties are often explained away with reference to Field (what is happening in the social action), Tenor (who is taking part in the action), and Mode (what part the language is playing) variables.

However, in addition to register variation, texts may also exhibit variation in genre. The use of genre as a concept in SFL differs from its traditional use in two respects. Firstly, linguistic definition of genre draws on Russian literary theorist Bakhtin's (1986) identification of speech genres as "relatively stable types of interactive utterances" (cited in Eggins & Martin, 1997, p. 236). This bird's-eye view of genre includes everyday as well as literary genres. Thus, a transactional encounter such as buying meat at the butcher's, for example, is a genre, as is an editorial in a newspaper or a staff meeting in the workplace. Secondly, in the SFL approach to genre, different genres are different ways of using language to achieve different culturally established tasks, and texts of different genres are texts which are achieving different purposes in the culture. Here a text's genre is identified by the sequence of functionally distinct stages or steps through which it unfolds. Therefore, the major reflex of differences in genres is the staging structure of texts. These niceties are often captured with reference to the Context of Culture (CC) in which the texts are produced.

The implications are then that (a) genre is realized through register and register, in turn, is realized through language, (b) context has two layers— a generic layer above and beyond register and a register layer above language, (c) within the approach outlined here, register and genre are two realizational planes in an SFL view of texts. In fact, two texts may be from the same genre, but show variation in register.

### **The GSP of a genre in SFL**

What is 'text' in an SFL model? This is one of the basic questions that Halliday (1978, 1985a, 1989) has raised. Halliday and Hasan (1989, p.10) define 'text' in the simplest way as "language that is functional." By functional, they mean "language that is

doing some job in some context.” In SFL, the most outstanding characteristic of a text that helps one distinguish between a text and non-text or a complete and incomplete text is the attribute of *textual unity*. Textual unity in any text, whether written or spoken, is divided into two types: *unity of structure* (macro connexity) and *unity of texture* (micro connexity).

Halliday (1973, 1978, 1985) has also introduced the terms, Field (the nature of the social action that is taking place), Tenor (the nature of the participants in the action, their statuses and roles), and Mode (what part the language is playing in the situation) as three features of the Context of Situation (CS) to help interpret the social context of a text, i.e., the environment in which meanings are being exchanged. These concepts, in fact, refer to certain aspects of the socio-cultural situations that always act upon the language as it is being used.

Halliday and Hasan (1989, p.55) have introduced an additional concept: *Contextual Configuration*, or CC for short, as an account of the significant attributes of a social activity. Specifically, each of the three features of the CS (Field, Tenor, and Mode) may be thought of as a *variable* that is represented by some specific value(s). Each variable functions as a point of entry to any situation as a set of possibilities and/or options. Thus, the variable ‘Field’ may have the value ‘praising’ or ‘blaming’; ‘Tenor’ may allow a choice between ‘parent-to-child’ or ‘employer-to-employee while ‘Mode’ might be ‘speech’ or ‘writing’. And, any member of related pair of options can combine with any member of any other to form a specific CC. Therefore, a CC is a specific set of values that realizes field, tenor, and mode.

Moreover, disseminating this approach to text analysis, Halliday and Hasan (1989, pp. 59-65) have also introduced the concept of *Generic Structure Potential* (GSP) for any specific CCs to define a genre (pp. 63-65). They examine a set of similar spoken texts. They then identify their *obligatory* and *optional* rhetorical elements of texts, and establish what they call the GSP of the genre "Service Encounter" that of a "Shop Transaction" as

$$[(G).(SI)^{\downarrow}][{(SE.)\{SR^{\downarrow}SC^{\downarrow}\}^{\downarrow}S^{\downarrow}}]P^{\downarrow}PC^{\downarrow}(^{\downarrow}F)$$

Specifically, a GSP of this type is a condensed statement of the conditions under which a text will be seen as one that is appropriate to a CC. In plain words, it is

suggested that any shop transaction in English potentially consists of the following macro-structural elements: Greeting (G), Sale Initiation (SI), Sale Enquiry (SE), Sale Request (SR), Sale Compliance (SC), Sale (S), Purchase (P), Purchase Closure (PC), and Finis (F). The round brackets in the above GSP indicate optionality of enclosed elements. Therefore, G, SI, SE, and F are optional and SR, SC, S, P, and PC are obligatory. The dot between elements means ‘more than one’ option in sequence. The arrow shows *iteration*. The braces with a curved arrow indicate that the degree of iteration for elements in the square brackets is equal. That is to say, if SR occurs twice, then SC must also occur twice. Finally, the caret sign (^) shows sequence.

In other words, Halliday and Hasan (1989) maintain that any shop transaction comprises a series of *optional* and *obligatory* macro-structural elements sequenced in a *specific order* and that “the obligatory elements define the genre to which a text belongs” (see Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 62). And, in essence, an optional element is one which CAN occur but is not obliged to occur and an obligatory element is one in the absence of which the text would not be interpreted as the genre to which the text belongs. Such elements can vary in size, but normally contain at least one proposition. It is, therefore, possible to express the total range of optional, obligatory, and iterative elements and their sequence in such a way that all the possibilities and/or potential of text structure for every text appropriate to a specific CC may be exhausted. In other words, it is possible to state the *Generic Structure Potential* (GSP) of a genre. That is, each text may have a different *actual structure*, but each realizes a possibility built into its GSP.

Applying this theoretical model to a different genre, the present study attempts to establish the GSP of English newspaper editorials.

### **Previous research on the GSP of various genres**

Mitchell (1975) is one of the earliest attempts to identify the GSP of a genre (although at that time he did not use the term). He outlines the following elements in the genre of *Shop Transaction* in Libya: Salutation (S), Inquiry as to the Object of the Sale (IOS), Examination of the Object of the Sale (EOS), Bargaining (B), and Conclusion (C). In other words, Mitchell (1975) identifies the *rhetorical structure* of the genre of *Shop Transaction* in Libya as S^IOS^EOS^B^C. The comparison of this GSP with the GSP that

Halliday and Hasan (1989) offer for the genre of Shop Transaction in England is revealing (see above). It remains to be seen, however, to what extent “shop transactions” in other cultures may follow suit.

Applying Halliday and Hasan (1989) theoretical model to a different genre, Ghadessy (1993) establishes the GSP of *Business Letters* (BLs). He suggests that BLs essentially “include an initial Reference (R) category followed by the category of Addressing the Issue (AI), and finally a Closing (C) category. The boundaries of this discourse structure are identified as the Initial Greeting (IG) and the final Complimentary Close (CC)” (p. 162). He also proposes the following model for business communication in general  $I^{(R/I)n^R}$  in which ‘I’ and ‘R’ stand for Initiation and Response, (^) and ( ) mean ‘followed by’ and ‘optional’ respectively, and (n) refers to the iteration of R/Is.

Following a similar theoretical model (Hasan, 1984), Paltridge (1993) investigates the rhetorical structure of the *Introduction sections of RAs* taken from the most cited specialized journals, exploring the possibility of disciplinary variation across three fields: environmental studies, linguistics and geography. He presents no evidence of significant disciplinary variation in his study. However, he discovers that the GSP of this (sub)genre contains the following structural elements: Background Information (BI), Indicating a Gap (IG), Rationale for Study (RS), Previous Research (PR), Justification for Study (JS), Purpose of Study (PS), Question Raising (QR) and Context of Study (CS). According to the author, of these, only two elements emerge as being “obligatory”: PR and PS. All other elements are found to be “optional” or in Hasan’s (1984) terms, *elaborative*, that is, they contribute to the development of a more elaborated text, but are not essential to the creation of texts as such. Paltridge (1993, p. 182) frames his proposed GSP in this way (for the key that explains the symbols, see Paltridge, 1993, p. xvi):

$$\{[(BI)^{PR}^{(QR)^{(IG)^{(JS)^{(CS)^{(RS)}}]}]}^{PS}\}$$

In an attempt to identify the GSP of *Introductions and Endings of essays*, Henry and Roseberry (1997) analyze 40 essays taken from different newspapers, magazines and encyclopedia entries. They hold that the communicative purpose of essays is “to put forward a point of view and either defend or explain it” (p. 480). They discover the GSP of the Introductions of essays to be  $(IT)^{(NF)^{CI}}$  suggesting that there are three



rhetorical elements in the Introductions of essays, those of Introducing the Topic (IT), Narrowing the Focus (NF), and stating Central Idea of the essay (CI), and that only the last one is an obligatory element. The first two optional elements merely provide sufficient background information whereby the main propositions can be presented. As to the structure of the Endings of essays, however, they identify the following elements: Commitment to Central idea (CC) and Expansion (EX).

### **Analyses of newspaper editorials**

An editorial is here defined as “an article in a newspaper that gives the opinion of the editor or publisher on a topic or item of news” (Sinclair, 1995). It appears that there is a relatively small set of serious published works on the rhetorical structure of (English) newspaper editorials (see, e.g., Bolivar, 1994; Sugiura, 1996; Riazi & Assar, 2000). As Connor (1996, p. 144) puts it:

Research on [newspaper] editorials cross-culturally is significant even if ESL students do not become editorial writers for, in most cases, they are readers of editorials. Good editorials are considered some of the best examples of persuasive writing in all countries; they set standards for written persuasion. At the present time, little is known cross-culturally about the genre.

Following the Birmingham school of text analysis, Bolivar (1994) investigates the macro-structure of English newspaper editorials (*The Guardian*). She proposes that “the internal structure of editorials can be described in terms of three fundamental turns: (a) Lead, (b) Follow, and (c) Valuate which are realized by sentences” (1994, p. 279). These triads (LFV) may, in turn, combine with other triads to make up a higher unit called ‘Movements’.

Replicating this study in a new environment, at a different point in time, and with a different corpus, Riazi and Assar (2000) map this British-oriented three-part structure onto the Persian newspaper editorials. They suggest that Persian newspaper editorials essentially follow a similar tripartite structural pattern confirming Bolivar’s (1994) findings.

Last of all, Sugiura (1996) assesses the linguistic quality of five English-language newspaper editorials taken from two quality newspapers: *The Asahi Evening News* (a

major Japanese newspaper which carries a translated version of the same editorial printed in the morning edition of the *Asahi Shimbun*), and *The Times* (a British newspaper). Following Winter (1977) and his disciple Hoey (1983), Sugiura (1996) looks contrastively at the structural and rhetorical organization of editorials from two distinct perspectives. On a micro-structural level, Masayoshi Sugiura (1996) focuses on the quantitative features of texts such as the passive system and various facets of lexical cohesion (repetition, synonyms, and lexical variation/density). And, on a macro-structural level, qualitative rhetorical features such as clause relations and information/thematic structures are explored. Here, Sugiura (1996) brings into play Winter's problem-solution model and Hoey's general-to-particular vs. particular-to-general patterns of text organization.

What of the lessons to draw? This dip into the potentially accessible literature points to a few indisputable facts. First, newspaper editorials seem to be a neglected genre, although it is so important a genre as its siblings. It appears that the reason for its being the 'Cinderella' genre in the academy is perhaps because it is only marginally related to TESOL industry. Secondly, no (un) published investigation has yet recorded the *Generic Structure Potential* (GSP) of editorial texts. Further, most genre-specific studies have drawn on the work of Swales focusing on the *move-and-step* structure of texts. Thus, introduction and application of SFL as an analytic tool for the analysis of editorial texts as a genre appears to be a novel conjuring revelation! Altogether, all this seems to be a plausible *raison d'être* to justify the present study.

### **The data**

To support its intent, this research capitalized on a corpus of 30 English newspaper editorials culled from the daily electronic version of *The Washington Times*, (<http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>) which includes all of the original content from its daily printed version (for the list of sampled editorials, refer to Appendix 1). The *Washington Times* is a full-service, general interest daily newspaper in the capital of the USA. Founded in 1982, it has quickly become one of the most-often-quoted newspapers in the U.S. It has gained a reputation for hard-hitting investigative reporting and thorough coverage of politics and policy. The *Washington Times* is, in a word, a representative of

"America's Newspapers." The Web site is updated around the clock with breaking news from the *Associated Press* and *United Press International*.

A few noteworthy points should be made here. Firstly, one critical decision that was made in collecting the required data was how to draw a sample from a large universe. In line with the purpose(s) of the study, *non-probability* sampling, which comprises a series of nonrandom procedures for selecting the elements of the sample seemed to be appropriate (cf. Ary et al., 1996, p. 180). To be more specific, a *convenience* or *accidental* sampling procedure, which includes picking available cases for the study was used to collect the required data. Obviously, the success of such procedures depends on the knowledge, expertise, and sound judgment of the expert. One should be aware, therefore, of the limitations of such sampling techniques and use the method with extreme caution.

Secondly, in order to avoid the possible influence(s) of generational and diachronic changes in transmissional style of this genre, only editorials published in the year 2003 were included in the sample. Last, for the number of cases in the sample to be representative of the characteristics of the population, a large pool of editorials published over a span of four months and culled from what was available at the time in digital files on the Internet was utilized. Of this large corpus, then, only 30 editorials were expediently selected, seeking a smaller and more manageable text corpus. This is simply because, for 30 or more samples with 30 or more cases per sample, the sampling distribution appears to be normally distributed (cf. Hatch & Farhady, 1982, p. 98).

### **Framework for the analysis of editorial texts: The Identification of texts**

In order to figure out what sort of rhetorical organizations are used in the language of English-language newspapers, the present work investigated the macro-rhetorical structure of editorial texts from a Systemic Functional (SF) point of view. As Halliday and Hasan (1989) have emphasized, connected text is organized by two complementary principles which they have termed "unity of structure" and "unity of texture." In the former case, multivariate rhetorical patterns, where the juxtaposition of functionally differentiated elements A-B-C-D ... comprises a whole, are accounted for. In the latter case, a number of lexico-grammatical items, otherwise isolated, are linked through a text to form "cohesive

chains” by virtue of their semantic relations to one another (such as co-reference, synonymy, etc.).

In effect, the conceptualization, identification, and definitions of the *obligatory* and *optional* elements, which constituted the editorial texts, took place in a pilot study by the present researcher. The concept of obligatory and optional elements of structure used in this study is essentially that developed by Halliday & Hasan (1989, pp. 60-62). These elements typically exhibit some internal coherence (for the definition of ‘obligatory’ and ‘optional’ elements, see pp. 7-8 above).

### **Development of a coding system**

The initial drafting, in the pilot study, of the global (rhetorical) elements was based on a sample of five editorial texts out of a total of 30. However, follow-up analyses of the thirty editorial texts by the present researcher individually as well as later discussions with a postgraduate researcher (Dr E. Babaii) produced a set of elements that seem to accurately describe almost all rhetorical elements in the editorials studied.

The chunking of the texts into smaller meaningful rhetorical units was the hard job. However, linguistic clues that texts generally use to demonstrate internal coherence, together with boundary markers and typographical cues, were utilized in the analyses to identify the elements. A fairly straightforward source for elements recognition was the editorial writers’ explicit text division devices, such as paragraph divisions, italics, underlining, order of presentation, and other typographical devices. These were generally useful in preliminary chunking of texts. In addition, linguistic means were utilized for both boundary markings and function identification. Boundaries were marked with linguistic changes of various kinds, and, in particular, with simultaneous changes in more than one indicator. Typical boundary indicators utilized in the analyses were: discourse markers (connectors and other meta-textual signals: *consequently*, *however*, *sum up*, *in conclusion*, etc.), marked themes, tense and modality changes, introduction of new lexical references and of evaluative lexis, and so on and so forth.

### **Results**

Application of the methods described above demonstrated that some identified elements appeared regularly in the texts and that their order of appearance did not vary much. So, the sequence reported here is a canonical order.

**(a) Run-on Headline (RH):** (f = 30, 100%)

The first element identified, which is here referred to as a “Run-on Headline” (or RH for short), was one that established a theme around which the editorial was centered.

Run-on Headline (RH): *Example A*

## **Welcoming illegals to Maryland**

*(The Washington Times, March 10, 2003)*

Run-on Headline (RH): *Example B*

## **Visions of another Vietnam**

*(The Washington Times, March 29, 2003)*

**(b) Providing Background Information (BI):** (f = 11, 36.6%)

This was a rhetorical element which gave readers some background on the major issue(s) that were addressed in the text. It was essentially a description whose purpose was to set the scene for later development of a topic. Often reference was made to a place, thing, situation, etc. an aspect or some aspects of which were tackled.

Providing Background Information (BI): *Example A*

Just a month or so ago, Turkey and Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States and roles in the Middle East were as different as night and day. Turkey, a member of NATO, had managed to forge a close strategic partnership with the U.S. military dating back more than a decade. By contrast, the U.S.-Saudi relationship had been in decline for years. The fact that 15 of the 19 September 11 hijackers were Saudis and evidence that Saudi money funded a large portion of the network of madrassas throughout the United States and the Mid-east that supported Osama bin Laden damaged ties with Washington. So, too, did revelations that Saudi Arabia was funding terrorist groups like Hamas.

*(The Washington Times, March 28, 2003)*

Providing Background Information (BI): *Example B*

In December, CEO Richard White announced a \$48 million shortfall in Metro's 2004 budget. In January, they proposed a package of fare and parking increases. Tonight and tomorrow, Metro officials will again gauge public opinion on that package during hearings in Fairfax and Montgomery counties.

*(The Washington Times, March 4, 2003)*

**(c) Addressing an Issue (AI):** (f = 30, 100%)

This element served as a motivation for the editorial. In other words, it indicated that there existed an issue that must be debated. The issue was often an important current sociopolitical topic that must be necessarily addressed and resolved in one way or another.

Addressing an Issue (AI): *Example A*

The death of each soldier in Iraq brings a sadness, a void, a fear of worse to come. However, while the cost of operation Iraqi Freedom has been sad, it has, comparatively speaking, been far less than headlines have made it and fears have imagined it.

*(The Washington Times, April 2, 2003)*

Addressing an Issue (AI): *Example B*

Stop. Before you continue this editorial, take a moment to place your palm on the adjacent column, fingers pressed together. The distance from your index finger to your pinky should be enough to about cover the 3 inches of text in the column. Those 3 inches don't seem like much. But, until the ban on partial-birth abortion becomes a law, those 3 inches are the legal measure of personhood — the distance that separates an abortion and an infanticide.

*(The Washington Times, March 12, 2003)*

**(d) Argumentation (A):** (f = 30, 100%)

This element referred to both the process of argumentation and the arguments produced in that process. Argumentation uses language to justify or refute a standpoint, with the aim of securing agreement in views. Specifically, propositions are put forward as claims, and other propositions or reasons are put forward as justification and/or refutation of those claims.

Argumentation (A): *Example A*

**INITIATION OF  
ARGUMENTATION:**

The UN is useful

In fact, if any organization has forfeited whatever legitimacy it once might have held on political and economic matters in post-Saddam Iraq, it has to be the United Nations, and in particular, the Security Council.

**ARGUMENT 1:**

But its past records show that it is dysfunctional.

The notion that the United Nations can assume the leadership role in restoring Iraq's political system seems implausible in the aftermath of its 12-year role of appeasement and accommodation following the first Persian Gulf War. After its November passage of Resolution 1441, the U.N. Security Council repeatedly failed in its responsibility to enforce the resolution's "serious consequences" in the face of Saddam Hussein's unrelenting failure to comply.

**ARGUMENT 2:**

Also as promoter of international security, it has been dysfunctional.

In its role as promoter of international security and safety, the United Nations has demonstrated itself to be a dysfunctional, counterproductive organization that must be radically reformed.

**CLOSURE OF ARGUMENTATION:**

Therefore, the USA cannot rely on it.

One indisputable conclusion is that the United States cannot rely upon the Security Council for the protection of its national-security interests. Today, the world is too dangerous a place to turn over such important matters as the political reconstruction of Iraq to so dysfunctional an organization.

*(The Washington Times, April 15, 2003)*

Argumentation (A). Example B

**INITIATION OF ARGUMENTATION:**

Arabs have different views about Saddam's fall.

One nearly universal fault with the war coverage was the practice of portraying Arab opinion as monolithic. But in reality, with hundreds of millions of Arabs in the world, it should come as no surprise that there are a wide variety of views about Saddam's demise.

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First, because some Arab neighbors think they lost nothing when Saddam's regime was overthrown.

Perhaps the most striking aspect of the conflict was the relative reserve shown by Iraq's neighbors as Saddam's regime was dismantled. Making clear that there was no love lost for the dictator among his fellow Arab leaders, the Middle East's largest English-language daily, the Arab News, editorialized on Friday that, "The fall of Baghdad is no reason for loss of Arab pride. There is no national Arab humiliation. This is not a war between a faithful Muslim state and a crusading, militant Christian West. It is a war between a dangerous tyrant — Saddam Hussein — whom Iraqis are glad to see the back of, and the U.S."

**ARGUMENT 2:**

Secondly, the Iraqis themselves were pleased to see Saddam's regime overthrown.

In many instances, Arab news outlets were quick to relay the elation of Iraqis once it was clear Saddam's grip on power

was over. On the entrance of American troops into Baghdad, Middle East Online reported that, "The reception by the Iraqis was very warm ... Some Iraqi children plucked flowers to give to the U.S. soldiers, who posed for photographs." Abdul Haid Ahmas, editor-in-chief of the Gulf News, qualified the sentiment: "As much as an Arab is pleased to see his Iraqi brothers free from the yoke of dictatorship that humiliated and tortured them for more than 20 years, his heart breaks from depression and pain seeing this sad end to Baghdad, collapsing under the chains of Marines' tanks."

**ARGUMENT 3:**

Next, some couldn't believe that Saddam surrendered easily.

Disillusionment and disbelief at the weakness of Saddam's Ba'ath Party were regular Arab sentiments. A shop owner in Beirut admitted that, "It frustrates me that they enter Baghdad without a fight." In denial at the Iraqi sense of relief, one Egyptian charged that, "These people dancing in the streets like fools are American spies."

**ARGUMENTATION**

So, Arabs have expressed a variety of feelings about Saddam's demise.

Excitement, shock, anticipation, denial, relief, elation, even apathy: These are Arabs' feelings at the end of the war.

*(The Washington Times, April 14, 2003)*

**(e) Articulating a Position (AP): (f = 30, 100%)**

This element specified the writer's position in regard to the topic debated. It described the angle from which the editorial looked at the issue and managed a particular public opinion. Rounding off the editorial, it often disseminated a standpoint from which the issue was viewed.

**Articulating a Position (AP): *Example A***

During Vietnam, it took the young, golden-bearded, love-making, anti-war boomers four years of steady anti-American efforts to undercut public morale and support. Today, the thin-haired, senior-moment susceptible, aging anti-war boomers at the upper reaches of big media will only have about four weeks to do their worst, while our young fighting men are doing their best. Dream on. Kumbaya.

*(The Washington Times, March 29, 2003)*

**Articulating a Position (AP): *Example B***



Reform of the medical liability system in this country is in need of urgent reform. By approving H.R. 5, the Judiciary Committee has taken a huge step in the right direction.  
(*The Washington Times*, March 7, 2003)

## **A detailed sample analysis**

Thirty editorial texts were carefully examined in actual terms. To demonstrate how the in-depth analysis of texts was made, a complete rhetorical analysis of a sample authentic editorial text is presented here. This is just the tip of the iceberg, however. This presentation is just concerned with the higher-level rhetorical structure of texts, i.e., the patterns that make up the larger stretches of texts.

The sample text below is an editorial from *The Washington Times* electronically published on the Op-Ed (Opinion-Editorial) web page of the site <http://www.washingtontimes.com> on Thursday, March 27, 2003, accessed on the same day in digital form on the net.

### **RUN-ON HEADLINE :**

The challenge of punishing war criminals

## **Punishing war crimes**

### **ADDRESSING AN ISSUE:**

Creating a legal mechanism to try Saddam Hussein as a war criminal

Once Iraq is liberated from Saddam Hussein, one of the most critical challenges facing the allied coalition will involve creating a legal mechanism for trying war crimes and serious human rights violations committed by the deposed dictator and others accused of serious crimes.

### **INITIATION OF ARGUMENTATION**

Some suggest trying Saddam in an international court

Some have suggested trying Saddam and senior aides responsible for helping him carry out atrocities against the Iraqi people before an international criminal tribunal established under the enforcement authority of the United Nations Security Council.

### **ARGUMENT 1:**

If this is done, the relationship between the US administration and the UNSC members will be improved.

The main argument for this is that, by doing so, the Bush administration can begin to improve its relationship with

Security Council members who opposed U.S. policy on Iraq, including France, Russia and China.

**(COUNTER)ARGUMENT 2:**

This is no good, because France whose past records in terms of US war against Saddam is not positive may have a veto power.

We believe that this would be a bad idea. Given France's active efforts to sabotage Washington's attempt to secure the peaceful disarmament of Iraq, it would hardly serve U.S. interests or the interests of world peace to invest such authority in countries like France, which have behaved irresponsibly when it comes to dealing with Saddam Hussein. No careful, prudent U.S. statesman should turn Iraq policy over to a body like the Security Council, where President Jacques Chirac's government wields veto power.

**(COUNTER)ARGUMENT 3:**

Another problem is that because these courts have a distinctly colonial air, they must be avoided.

Aside from the problems inherent in turning such a serious matter over to the Security Council, there's another problem with letting the U.N.-created judicial bodies handle this. As attorneys Lee Casey and David Rivkin, veterans of the Justice Department during the Reagan and first Bush administrations, wrote on the op-ed page in yesterday's edition of The Washington Times, these courts "have a distinctly colonial air about them." The tribunal investigating Yugoslav war crimes, for example, "does not include "a single judge from the states of the former Yugoslavia, over which it exercises authority." Since Iraq and its backers are already trying to smear the coalition policy as a dark, imperialist venture, any scheme which appears to substantiate this is something to be avoided.

**(COUNTER)ARGUMENT 3:**

Also creating a new ICC is no good, simply because the UNSC members may have a voice in it.

Another option — turning things over to a new International Criminal Court (ICC) — has problems as well, in particular the fact that it could have to take referrals from the Security Council. Such an arrangement would require the agreement of France, China and Russia — Saddam's leading defenders.

**ARTICULATION OF A POSITION:**

A better idea is to let the liberated Iraqis themselves set up a legal mechanism for trying Saddam Hussein and his cabal to look democratic.

Messrs. Casey and Rivkin have put forward a better idea: allowing the liberated Iraqis to set up institutions for trying Saddam and any other surviving members of his cabal. As the United States has rightly opposed fatally flawed schemes such as the ICC, it is in our interest to show that national court systems in democratic states are up to the task of trying suspected war criminals. A good place to start would be by giving the liberated Iraqi people themselves the opportunity to try the ousted Ba'athist leadership.

### **The marked patterns (f = 3, 10%)**

Of the 30 editorials analyzed, three showed a marked structure. That is to say, while taking up a topic to discuss, the editorial writers did not delay expressing a point of view about it. In other words, writers simultaneously addressed an issue (AI) and expressed a point of view about it right from scratch. This, however, did not disturb the regular generic pattern of editorials as such. Such a pattern can be called a mixed (AI+ AP) model of text development. A few examples may serve our purpose here:

#### **Addressing an Issue and Articulating a Position (AI+AP): *Example A***

### **The impending war**

We are about to go to war with much of the world population against us, with the managing international structures dysfunctional and the enemy prepared to use chemical and biological weapons against our troops. It is a moment of some measurable danger to the country. While the right of dissent and partisan opposition is inherent under our Constitution, the exercising of that right against the president's policy as we enter war may make it harder for our country to fully succeed in the war and its immediate aftermath. There is a moral difference between the right of dissent (which is inviolate) and the exercise of it at a moment of high national danger. We would suggest that wisdom — if not patriotism — would guide American citizens to abate the public expression of their opposition and rally 'round the president as our troops enter the battlefield.

*(The Washington Times, March 17, 2003)*

#### **Addressing an Issue and Articulating a Position (AI+AP): *Example B***

### **The Fed meets**

Nobody doubts that Federal Reserve Chairman Alan Greenspan and his colleagues would aggressively react to severe economic dislocations that could result from the imminent war with Iraq. However, in the light of the economy's recent deterioration and under the same rationale the Fed used to reduce short-term interest rates in November, Mr. Greenspan and his colleagues should take out another insurance policy against the current "soft spot" and the potentially devastating economic effects of the coming conflict. At today's Fed policy-making meeting, lowering the overnight interest rate by one-quarter of a percentage point is in order.

*(The Washington Times, March 18, 2003)*

### **Validity and reliability of the analyses**

In all text-analytic research, one needs to do certain logical tests to establish the validity and reliability of the analyses. Following Yin (1984), construct validity here refers to “establishing correct operational measures for the concepts being studied” (p. 40) and reliability refers to “demonstrating that the operations of a study can be repeated with the same results” (p. 41). In order to increase construct validity by developing a sufficiently operational set of measures, this research adopted the steps recommended by Yin (1984) for case study research. That is to say, analyses of editorial texts were reviewed and cross-examined several times during frequent discussions with a postgraduate researcher (Dr. E. Babaii) who had an opportunity, at several project meetings, to react to the progress of the whole work. This led to redefinitions and reformulations of the elements in some cases.

Although there was high agreement between the coders, some concepts needed to be redefined and refined further. After considerable redefinition, the coders reanalyzed independently 10 editorials in the sample in order to achieve almost complete agreement about the identified elements. As a result, some discrepancies were found with regard to the exact boundaries of a few of the rhetorical elements.

Besides, to vindicate the reliability of the analyses, of the available corpus, 10 texts were randomly selected. Two judges, who were trained in a joint training session beforehand, were asked to independently code the texts. Then, using Kappa coefficient ( $k$ ) as an appropriate non-parametric measure to index the degree of agreement between the coders and their codings (cf. Cohen, 1960; Fliess, 1971; Gelfand & Hartmann, 1975), the inter-coder and intra-coder reliability estimates were estimated. Results demonstrated an acceptable degree of agreement across the coders ( $\kappa = .87$ ) and between the codings ( $\kappa = .81$ ). To the best of our knowledge, however, there seems to be no agreed-upon rule(s) for deciding upon an acceptable cut-off value to support the reliability of text-analytic studies (cf. Hartmann, 1977). Nevertheless, according to Gelfand & Hartmann, 1975, cited in Crookes, 1986, p. 65) kappa coefficient must “exceed .60” in order to be a dependable and valid index of an “acceptable degree of agreement” between judges.

### **Concluding remarks**

Hasan (1984, p. 79) describes the Generic Structure Potential (GSP) of a particular genre as “a statement of the structural resources available within a given genre.” A GSP is, thus, an abstract theoretical notion (Halliday & Hasan, 1989, p. 64) that

... express[es] the total range of optional, [iterative], and obligatory elements and their order in such a way that we exhaust the possibilities of text structure for every text that can be appropriate to [the Contextual Configuration of that text].

In line with this, in this research, we attempted to describe the *GSP of English newspaper editorials* as an important public genre. Based on the Systemic Functional (SF) theory of language and genre (see Halliday & Hasan, 1989), we identified four *obligatory* structural elements (Run-on Headline, Addressing an Issue, Argumentation, and Articulating a Position) present in 90% of the editorials in the sample. They appeared in this order: RH^AI^A^AP. However, there also emerged a few *optional* elements (for the definitions of obligatory and optional elements, see pp. 7-8 above): providing Background Information (BI), which either preceded AI or followed it, Initiation of Argumentation (IA) which, in some cases, was necessary to help writers start off their arguments, and Closure of Argumentation (CA) sometimes used to nicely round off the arguments. The GSP for the editorials can, therefore, be cataloged as

$$RH^[(BI).AI]^{\{(IA)^{A_1^A_2^A \dots (CA)}\}_n}^{\{AP_1^AP_2^AP \dots\}_m}$$

In this GSP, the caret sign indicates sequence. The round brackets show optionality of enclosed elements. The dot between elements points to the fact that more than one option in sequence is possible. That is, BI may either precede or follow AI. The square brackets specify the restraint on sequence. So they here indicate that neither BI nor AI may follow Argumentation (A) process and AP. The braces with an arrow indicate the degree of iteration. Finally, the subscript (n) and (m) refer to the iteration of sets. Therefore, both the argumentation process and its follow-up AP may be repeated.

In sum, the GSP presented here is a condensed statement suggesting that an unmarked English newspaper editorial typically carries a headline and addresses an issue which may or may not require some background information occurring either before or after it. It then starts off an argumentation for or against the addressed issue by an initiation statement that is optional. It makes the arguments, and finally takes a position about the

issue discussed. This latter process may reoccur. This to say, an argumentation process begins with a series of arguments and ends with the articulation of a position. This process can then be repeated until the planned conclusion is drawn.

One should be very cautious about the interpretation of the findings of this study. While analyzing schematic macro structures of texts has proved an invaluable way of looking at texts, analysts are increasingly aware of the dangers of oversimplifying by assuming blocks of texts to be “mono-functional” and ignoring writers’ complex purposes and “private intentions” (see Bhatia, 1999). There is also the problem raised by Crooks (1986) of how to validate text analyses to ensure that they are not simply products of the analyst’s intuitions. It is believed here that in a comprehensive agenda on newspaper editorials, other research paradigms such as in-depth interviews with writers investigating their writing processes (cf. Myers, 1990; Connor & Mauranen, 1999) could also be encouraged. It seems that interviews with writers of the editorials could provide a more realistic and tangible user—actor account of the processes involved in writing up an editorial.

There is surely no implication here that the details of description provided above is beyond reproach. This work can be examined from two angles: it can be generally seen as disseminating an SFL view of text for the study and analysis of genres and it can also be specifically understood as providing examples of such analysis of texts. Obviously, if the validity of the former is doubted, then the latter is also invalidated, but the reverse is not necessarily true. Nothing makes us see the shortcoming(s) of a theoretical model so effectively as the practical study of texts.

Several directions for further research can be envisaged. Firstly, it seems that in genre analytic studies, as Swales (1990) has aptly pointed out, we have still remained at the exploratory stage rather than hypothesis-testing. In fact, with the exception of few studies (see, e.g., Crookes, 1986; Williams, 1999), there is a dearth of confirmatory research attempting to examine whether the identified generic patterns apply to other corpuses. To serve this line of investigation, then, it seems advisable to consolidate the findings of previous exploratory genre analyses, including the one reported here, through further research. Secondly, a fascinating and largely uncharted area for further research is the analysis of argument structures. In texts such as editorials in which a person gets

involved in both the process of argumentation and the production of arguments, one may unpack the argument patterns both within one language and culture and across two or more languages and cultures.

In addition, a genre study of the diachronic evolution (cf. Halliday, 1988) of editorials seems particularly fruitful as there may be indications that newspaper editorial has somewhat changed its communicative purposes during its life span. Furthermore, this study was restricted to English 'newspaper' editorials and did not deal with other types of evaluative discourse that might have different configurations of contextual features. Therefore, an analysis of editorials in 'journals' and 'magazines' would probably yield revealing results. Last, but certainly not least, cross-cultural variations may blur or disturb the rhetorical organization of a genre. Another study can thus attempt to (dis)establish whether the characteristics reported in this study are maintained in newspaper editorials written in other languages or in other non-native varieties of English across other cultures (cf. Connor, 1996).

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**Appendix 1:** List of editorials analyzed (N = 30)

- 3.1 Politics and the economy. (2003, Feb. 18). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.2 A win for national security. (2003, Feb. 19). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.3 It's about time. (2003, March 4). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.4 Make 'em talk. (2003, March 5). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.5 Moving forward on liability reform. (2003, March 7). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.6 A new crop. (2003, March 9). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.7 Welcoming illegals to Maryland. (2003, March 10). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.8 The D.C. budget alarm. (2003, March 11). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.9 3 inches from infanticide. (2003, March 12). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.10 The D.C. council and the IG. (2003, March 13). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.11 The shots in Serbia. (2003, March 15). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.12 Solari comes to Washington. (2003, March 16). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.13 The impending war. (2003, March 17). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.14 The Fed meets. (2003, March 18). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.15 What role for Turkey? (2003, March 19). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.16 Steadily (and boldly) as she goes. (2003, March 25). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.17 Punishing war crimes. (2003, March 27). *The Washington Times*. Accessible online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.

- 3.18 Riyadh, Ankara and the fall of Saddam. (2003, March 28). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.19 Visions of another Vietnam. (2003, March 29). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.20 Emerging threats. (2003, March 30). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.21 More bad school news. (2003, March 31). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.22 Counting the cost, comparatively. (2003, April 2). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.23 Doha going down. (2003, April 4). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
- 3.24 Wanted school accountability. (2003, April 5). *The Washington Times*. Accessed online via: <http://www.washingtontimes.com/op-ed/>.
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